

CANTERBURY PROVINCIAL COUNCIL BUILDINGS

CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND





Detail of roof and interior wall, Stone Chamber.



Published by the

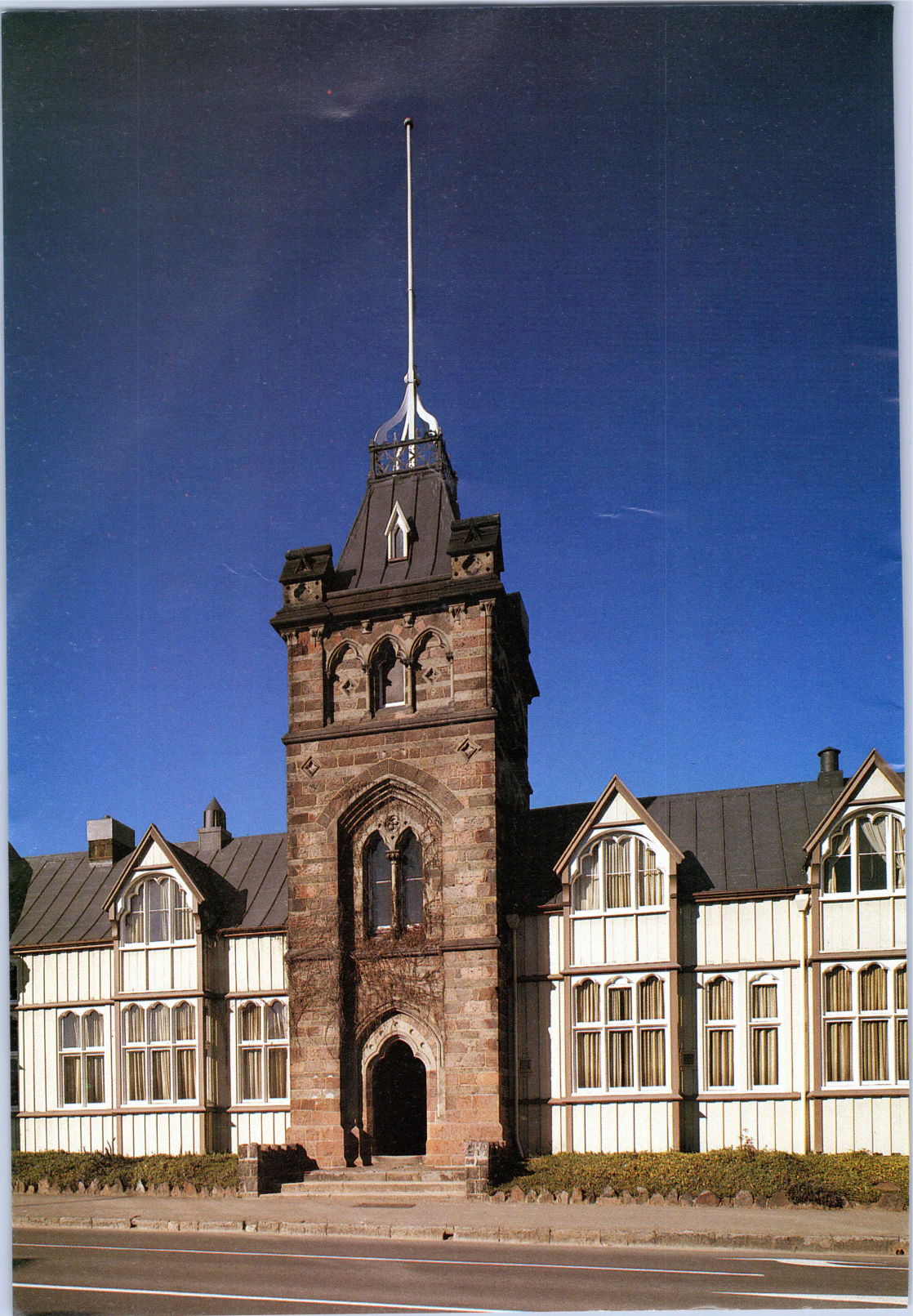
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The Canterbury Provincial
Council Buildings



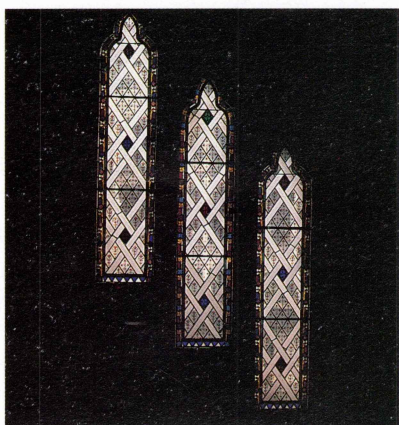
Christchurch's Finest Victorian Buildings

Visitors to Christchurch usually remark on the flatness of the city, its rectangular pattern of streets, its open squares and parks and the Avon River. Many also notice the large number of buildings, especially on the western side of the central city, which are Gothic in design, built of wood and stone.

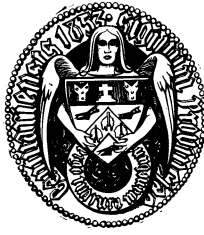
Of these Gothic buildings in Christchurch, the gem is without doubt the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings. This group of buildings was erected between 1858 and 1865, in three stages. The stages are skillfully unified yet each is quite distinct. Christchurch was fifteen years old when it gained what most believe is one of its finest buildings, the stone Provincial Council Chamber of 1865.

Because of their great architectural and historical significance, the Buildings have been given the New Zealand Historic Places Trust's highest classification. They are also listed as being worthy of preservation in the Christchurch City Council's district planning scheme. The people of Canterbury have always been proud of these buildings and we hope that you will be impressed by their beauty and interested in their story.

The first part of this guide book tells the story of provincial government in Canterbury. The second part describes the Buildings themselves. If you have bought this book at the start of a visit to the Buildings, you may like to read the second part first, as it identifies features of the buildings which are particularly worthy of note. If you are being conducted round the Buildings by one of the volunteer guides, these features will be pointed out to you.



*Above: Stairway to the visitors' gallery, Stone Chamber.
Left: Stairway window, Stone Chamber.*



The Provincial System

Between 1840 and 1850, six settlements were established in New Zealand, largely inspired by the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. The longest migration in human history — 20,000 kilometres — saw colonists leave Great Britain to found towns at Auckland, Wellington, New Plymouth, Nelson, Wanganui, Dunedin and Christchurch. The New Zealand settlers were at the farthest corner of the earth from the home country. There was no regular shipping service and with the erratic arrival of sailing ships months might elapse before news from Great Britain reached New Zealand. The Canterbury Settlement was the youngest of these colonies. The Canterbury Association's 'First Four Ships' arrived at Lyttelton between 16 and 27 December 1850. Within three years of being founded, this infant settlement was already governing itself as one of New Zealand's six original provinces.

New Zealand was governed under a provincial system of government from 1853 until 1876. The system was set up to serve a country in which the European settlers were scattered in several small settlements, separated by slow and unreliable transport and communications.

The British Government — New Zealand was then a colony of Great Britain — passed the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1852 and in 1853 six provinces were proclaimed. Each province was to have an elected Provincial Council and also an elected Superintendent who was not a member of the Council. The Constitution Act also provided for a Provincial Executive to advise the Superintendent on the exercise of his administrative powers. It became usual for most of the members of the Executive Council to be members

of the Provincial Council, which provided the necessary link between the Provincial Council and the Superintendent.

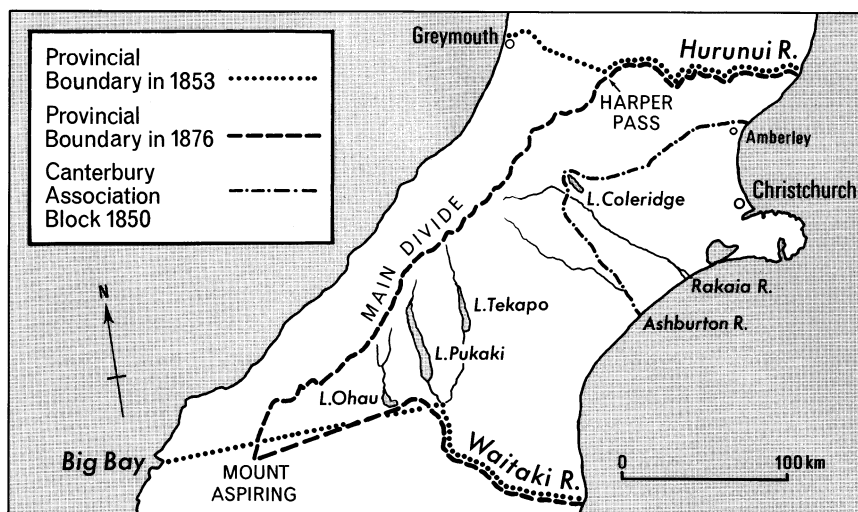
The Constitution Act also established a Central Government (based in Auckland until 1865 and after that in Wellington) consisting of the Governor and a two-house General Assembly. The Central Government had important powers in the areas of defence and native affairs, but the Provincial Governments had substantial powers of their own, especially after 1856 when they gained control of revenue from land sales, which gave Canterbury, though not some other provinces, a secure and independent financial base.

The federal system set up under the Constitution Act was similar to those of the United States, Canada and Australia. The provinces were somewhat like the states of the United States and Australia and the Canadian provinces, though the central government in New Zealand enjoyed a supremacy from the start which the central governments of the United States, Canada and Australia have never possessed.

The founders of Canterbury had always intended that the settlement would be a self-governing colony. Canterbury's population in 1853 was still only a few thousand, but the settlers were eager to exercise the powers of government which the Constitution Act offered them. Once the Provincial Governments had been set up, New Zealand had, in effect, six miniature Parliaments for a total European population of about 30,000! These miniature governments took themselves very seriously and endeavoured to emulate the 'Mother of Parliaments' at Westminster in every way they could, adopting all the trappings and ceremonial of the home Parliament, even though the 1856 census revealed that Canterbury as a whole had a population of 5,347 and Christchurch and Lyttelton between them only 1,475 residents.

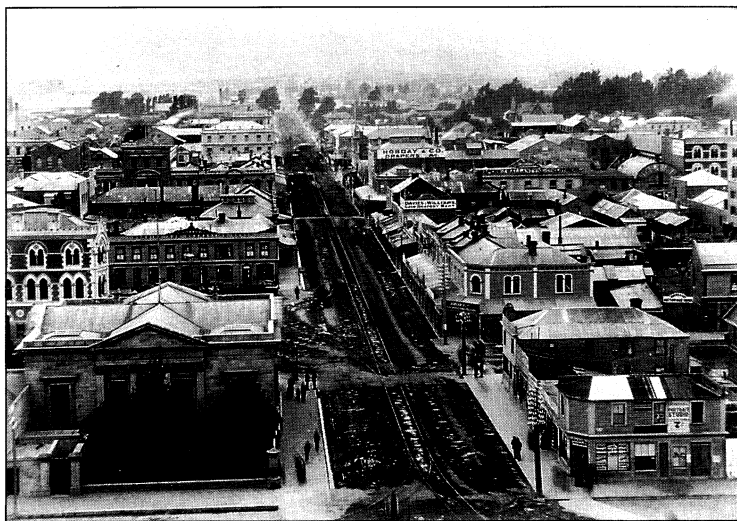
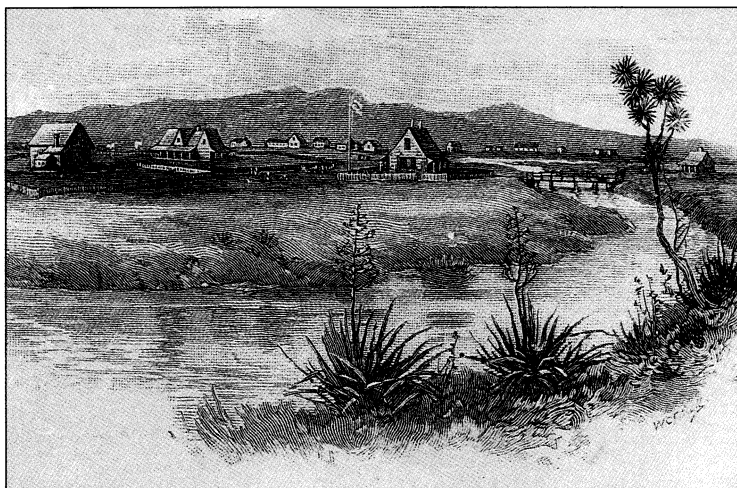
Canterbury's original boundaries ran from the east to the west coasts. The province had Nelson on its northern boundary and Otago on its southern. After gold had been discovered on the West Coast, however, Westland became first semi-independent as a county in 1868 and then a province in its own right in 1873. But South Canterbury's efforts to gain independence from Christchurch were never successful.

Between 1853 and 1876, the Provincial Governments were the main agencies for the development of their regions. Under their control were surveying and land regulations, immigration, public



works including roads, railways and harbours, education, hospitals and public health. Several of the provinces maintained agents in Great Britain to entice migrants. But other developments were slowly undermining the provincial system. By 1860 there were regular services by steamer between the provinces and in 1862 the electric telegraph reached New Zealand. The sense of New Zealand as a single country gradually overcame the strong provincial loyalties of the original settlements. But it was not until the middle of the 1870s that the provinces were finally abolished.

The provincial years were for Canterbury years of growth and achievement. By 1861, the population of the province had risen to 16,040 and that of Christchurch to 3,205. In the next three years, the provincial population doubled to 32,247 (with the discovery of gold in 'West Canterbury'); Christchurch by 1864 had 4,423 inhabitants. The achievements of the province in the 1860s were remarkable — they included New Zealand's first telegraph, railway and tunnel, and the engagement of New Zealand's first permanently employed scientist, Julius von Haast being appointed Provincial Geologist in 1861.



*Christchurch at the beginning
(the 1850s) and the end (the
1870s) of the provincial period.
The city and province grew sig-
nificantly in the period.*

Provincial Government in Canterbury

In the middle of 1853, Christchurch was "hardly a town at all in the English sense, simply a collection of scattered houses, separated by wide paddocks and uncultivated tracts". Nevertheless, the inhabitants of this "rather dreary little village" of straggling wooden-fronted shops and wide, muddy (in winter) or dusty (in summer) streets set about electing their first government with gusto. The election of the Province's first Superintendent took place in July. James Edward FitzGerald gained 135 votes, to defeat two rivals. In September there were lively elections for the twelve seats on the Provincial Council, the same number of voters, 318, taking part in the election.

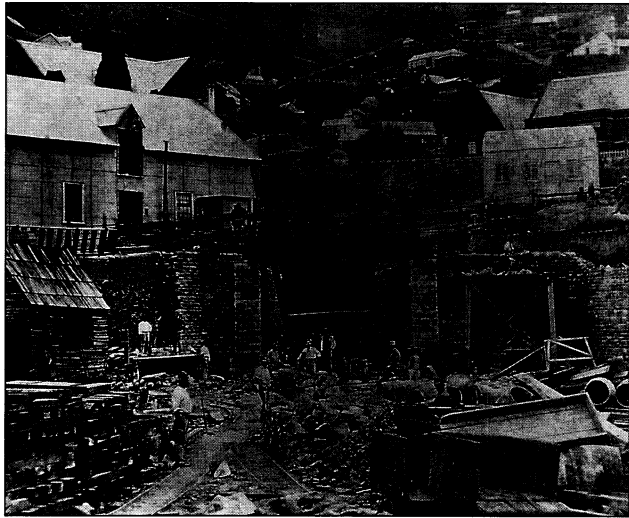
Voting was restricted to males aged twenty-one or over who owned property which had a value of at least £50 per year. New Zealand was the first country to have universal adult suffrage, but this did not come until nearly twenty years after the provinces had been abolished. This was also before the days of secret ballots. The candidates were elected on open hustings and there were no restrictions on treating of electors by candidates. The elections were festive, rollicking affairs.

Once set up, the new Provincial Government was in a position to take over the role and functions of the Canterbury Association which had founded the new settlement. The arrangements for this take over were formalised in the Canterbury Association Ordinance of July 1855. In March of that year, a new Provincial Council, of twenty-four rather than just twelve members, was elected. Subsequently the membership of the Council was increased to twenty-six (in 1857), to thirty-five (in 1861) and to forty-four (in 1866). With the separation of Westland at the end of 1867, the membership was reduced to thirty-nine, which it remained until the provinces were abolished.

The burning issue of provincial politics in the 1850s was land and the regulations governing its lease and purchase. The issue to some extent pitted the pastoralists (who wanted easy lease terms

and pre-emptive rights — that is the right of first option to buy lands they were leasing) against the small farming settlers, known colloquially as “cockatoos”. The pastoralists generally came out on top in this struggle, leading to the Provincial Council being described as “a stock owners’ club instead of a Legislative Council”.

The other major issue dividing the young settlement in the early years of provincial government was the question of access to the port of Lyttelton from Christchurch, the virtues of the Sumner Road (opened in 1857) being weighed against the ambitious rail tunnel (opened in 1867). Control over land sales in Canterbury gave the Provincial Government revenue to spend on such public works and to promote the immigration on which the Province’s future well-being was thought to depend.



The Lyttelton rail tunnel was a major issue in provincial politics in the 1850s and 1860s.

The Superintendents

In twenty-three years of provincial government, Canterbury had four Superintendents. Three of these loomed larger in provincial life than the fourth, Samuel Bealey, who held office from March 1863 to May 1866.

The three Superintendents who were dominant in provincial affairs were very different men. James Edward FitzGerald, who was Superintendent from July 1853 to October 1857, was the most intelligent and eloquent of all four Superintendents. William Sefton Moorhouse, in office from October 1857 until February 1863 and again from May 1866 to May 1868, was the most erratic, but also the most successful in terms of achievements, notably the rail tunnel to Lyttelton. William Rolleston, Superintendent from May 1868 until the provinces were abolished in October 1876, was a steady, prudent man, the perfect embodiment of Canterbury as a province of Anglican respectability.

FitzGerald, "a versatile and brilliant genius", arrived on the *Charlotte Jane* in December 1850 and won the first election held in Canterbury in 1853. Editor of the *Lyttelton Times* and later founder of *The Press*, he had a career also in national politics, but it was a career described as like "the flash of a meteor — dazzling for the moment but leaving no trace behind". He was Canterbury's Agent in London from 1857 and 1860, on his return becoming a Provincial Councillor and ardent opponent of Moorhouse's plan for a tunnel to Lyttelton — he founded *The Press* specifically to oppose the project. He is remembered, too, for his 1857 exploit of crossing the barely completed road over Evans Pass, driving a four-in-hand nonchalantly down the hazardous zig-zag on the Lyttelton side.

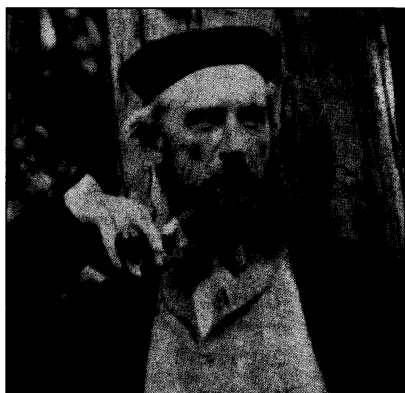
Moorhouse, "a big, strong, determined man" with "flair as a popular leader", first became Superintendent in 1857. He resigned the office in February 1863 partly to attend to private matters (he was in recurrent financial difficulties throughout his life) and partly because the tunnel, his great dream, was under way. He held the office of Superintendent again from 1866 to 1868, when he again resigned, this time because economic circumstances no longer

favoured his progressive, optimistic policies. After being defeated by Rolleston in the 1870 election of Superintendent, he left Christchurch for a political career based in Wellington where he died in 1881.

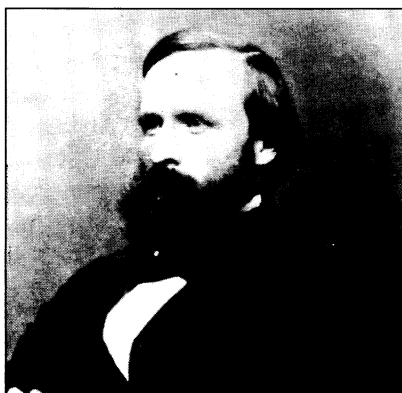
Moorhouse was a man of action where FitzGerald was a man of ideas. He earned a permanent place in Canterbury's history for his successful advocacy of a rail tunnel to Lyttelton, regarded by many as a rash undertaking, beyond the means of the young community. His perseverance and energy were one of the keys to Canterbury's early progress and it was Moorhouse who, in 1858, laid the foundation stone for the Provincial Council's first permanent home, the first wooden portion of the Provincial Council Buildings.

Samuel Bealey was "the least picturesque" of Canterbury's Superintendents. He was returned unopposed in 1863, then did not contest the 1866 election. A contemporary described him as "a mild, platitude-grinding nobody", though it was in his term that the Ferrymead railway (New Zealand's first steam railway) was opened, the Arthur's Pass road was built and the stone Provincial Council Chamber was completed. He later returned to England where he died in 1909.

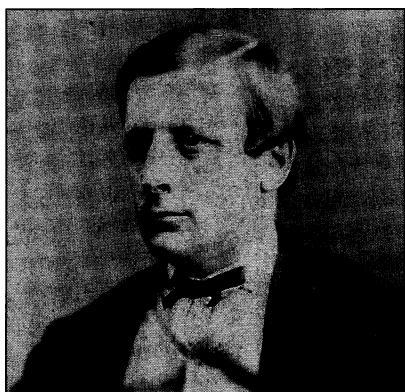
William Rolleston served the longest continuous term of any Superintendent, from 1868 to 1876. Though "representative of the party of caution" after Moorhouse's vigorous terms as Superintendent, he was an active Superintendent, though hampered always by constitutional problems, both between the Provincial and Central Governments and, within Canterbury, between Superintendent and Provincial Council. When he died in 1903 he was remembered for an "utter absence of self-seeking when dealing with public affairs".



James FitzGerald



William Moorhouse



William Rolleston



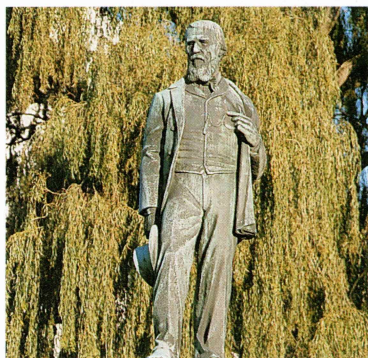
Samuel Bealey

The Superintendents Remembered

Canterbury's three principal Superintendents are all commemorated by statues in the same area of Christchurch, along Rolleston Avenue. Rolleston's statue is the most prominent. It was proposed in 1903, within a month of his death, and unveiled in 1906. The sculptor was H. Hampton. Moorhouse's was the first

statue erected, being proposed in the year of his death, 1881, and unveiled in 1885. It was sculpted by G.A. Lawson. FitzGerald's statue was donated to the city by R.E. Green. A preliminary design, the work of F.A. Shurrock, was exhibited in 1934 and the finished work erected in 1939.

The Superintendents are also all commemorated in place names. When the four "belts" around the original city of Christchurch were renamed early this century, they were given the names of the Superintendents. Moorhouse's avenue ran, appropriately, parallel to the railway line. Rolleston also gave his name to a township on the Canterbury Plains and to a mountain in the Arthur's Pass National Park. Bealey's name is attached to another mountain and a river in the same Park. In the Mount Cook National Park are the Moorhouse Range and Mount Sefton and his middle name, Sefton, is also the name of a North Canterbury township.



The statues of Moorhouse (top left), Rolleston (top right) and FitzGerald (left) are close to each other along Rolleston Avenue and in the Botanic Gardens.

Abolition of the Provinces

The seventh and last Canterbury Provincial Council met for one session in 1874 and another in 1875. When the members filed out of the Council Chamber on 18 June 1875, no-one realised they would not assemble again, so this epoch in Canterbury's history ended without any formal recognition. The province had come a long way from the twelve original councillors meeting in temporary quarters to the wealthy and successful squatters, farmers, business and professional men of the seventh Council who met in the elegant surroundings of the stone Provincial Council Chamber.

But the last years of provincial government in Canterbury had been dogged by political infighting. A Provincial Council on which rural and propertied interests were dominant had thwarted Rolleston's programme for educational and social measures and for needed improvements in Christchurch city. Provincial politics had ended in frustration and stalemate and the country-wide development programme of the Central Government, inaugurated by Julius Vogel, had undermined the basis of provincial independence. The country by the 1870s was far better served by transport and communication links than it had been in the 1850s. Neither leading colonial figures nor the British Government wished to see New Zealand permanently divided into separate political units.

The Act abolishing the provinces became law in October 1875, but its coming into effect was postponed until the following year, until after the December 1875 elections and the first session of the new Parliament. The Provincial Councils were, however, forbidden to meet in the meantime and on 1 November 1876, the era of provincial government came officially to an end. William Rolleston, the Superintendent, became the Central Government's agent in Canterbury responsible for passing administrative tasks to the government departments. A new system of local government was also inaugurated in 1876-77. At the time of abolition, Canterbury, unlike some of the other provinces, was solvent and passed substantial assets to the central government; from other provinces,



The Provincial Council's first meeting place, a newspaper office.

especially those affected by the Land Wars of the 1860s, the central government inherited substantial debts.

The closest Canterbury came to a ceremony to mark the end of its years as an independent political entity was a presentation to Rolleston at a sports gathering held in Latimer Square on the Province's anniversary day, 16 December 1876. At the meeting some pride was expressed that Canterbury had made a better go of provincial government than some other provinces, but the dubious political stewardship of the councillors of the 1870s meant the provincial era passed largely unlamented, even in Canterbury. A modern verdict is that "the council hardly measured up to its impressive surroundings".

In 1894, Sir John Hall, a member of the first and of the last Canterbury Provincial Council, sometime head of the Provincial Executive, Mayor of Christchurch, Prime Minister of New Zealand, and advocate of women's suffrage, declared that he thought "the work done in the old Provincial days, and the men who did it, deserve to be held in grateful recollection". "When we consider what our Canterbury Provincial Government left behind ... when we look at the roads, bridges, harbour works and even railroads, by which the province was opened up; when we look on the large immigration which was secured; on the liberal education system which was erected ... we are justified in believing that the days of the Provincial Government were some of Canterbury's best days."

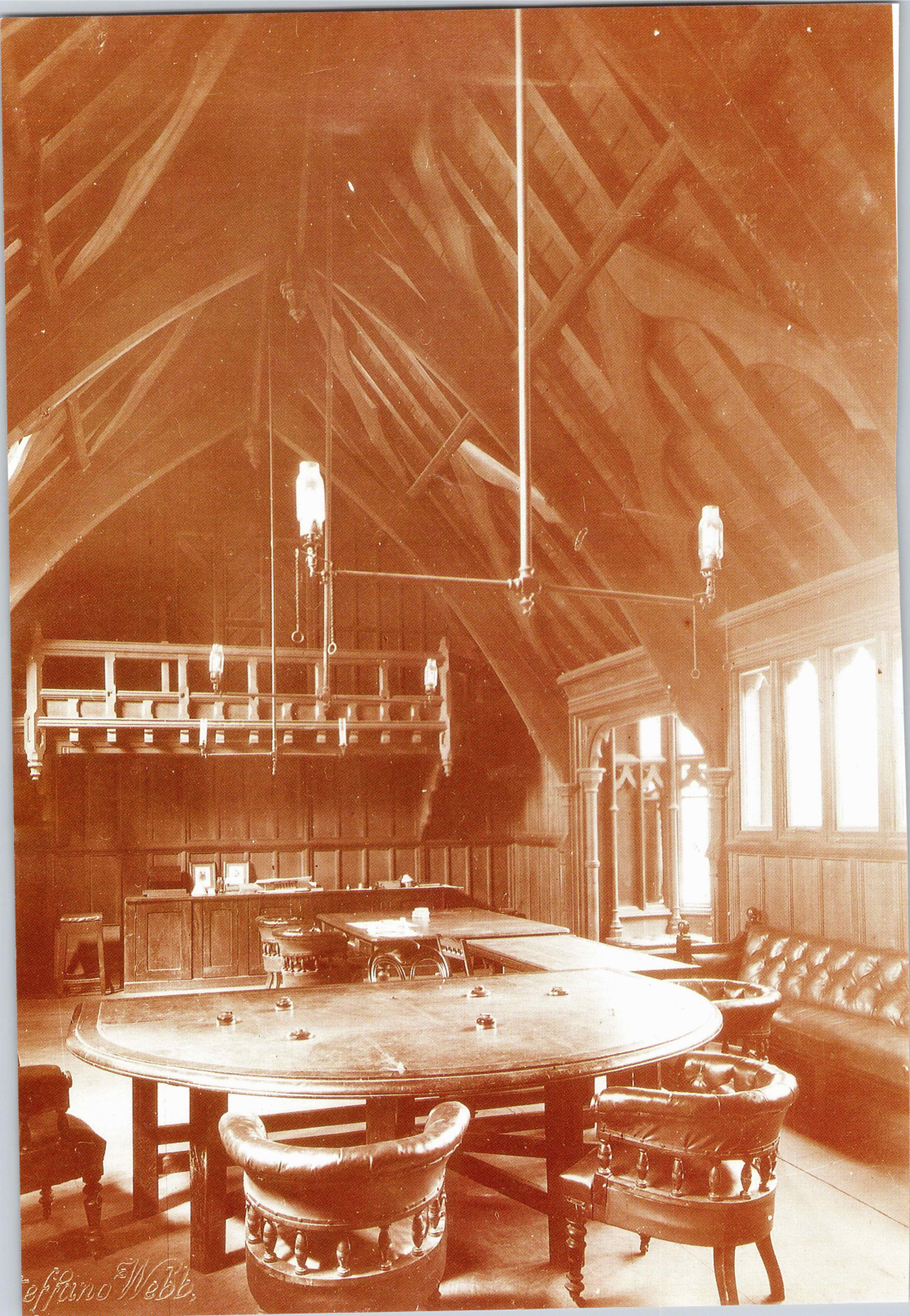
The Council's First Homes

When the Canterbury Provincial Council met for the first time on 29 September 1853 it was in the former offices of a short-lived newspaper, *The Guardian*. These premises were described by Henry Sewell as "a lone desolate looking wooden tenement all by itself in a potatoe garden ... approached over an open trackless common covered with fern and tussock grass". This building was on Chester Street. A local poet, Crosbie Ward, wrote later:

*Oh! don't you remember the Chamber, my boy
Our first Parliamentary shop?
With the skylights above and the four bare walls
And the rain pouring in from the top.*

In fact, within, an attempt was made to give this 'tenement' some dignity. It was furnished with a raised chair for the Speaker, with cheap crimson cloth and oak-patterned wallpaper. Not deterred by its humble surroundings, this first Council proclaimed "its full dignity as a petty Parliament" by adopting standing orders modelled on those of the British House of Commons.

Later sessions, before the Council built its own home, were held in a house on Oxford Terrace near the Worcester Street corner. The 1858 session, the last before the Council moved into the first part of today's Provincial Council Buildings, was held in the first Town Hall on High Street.



Steffano Webb

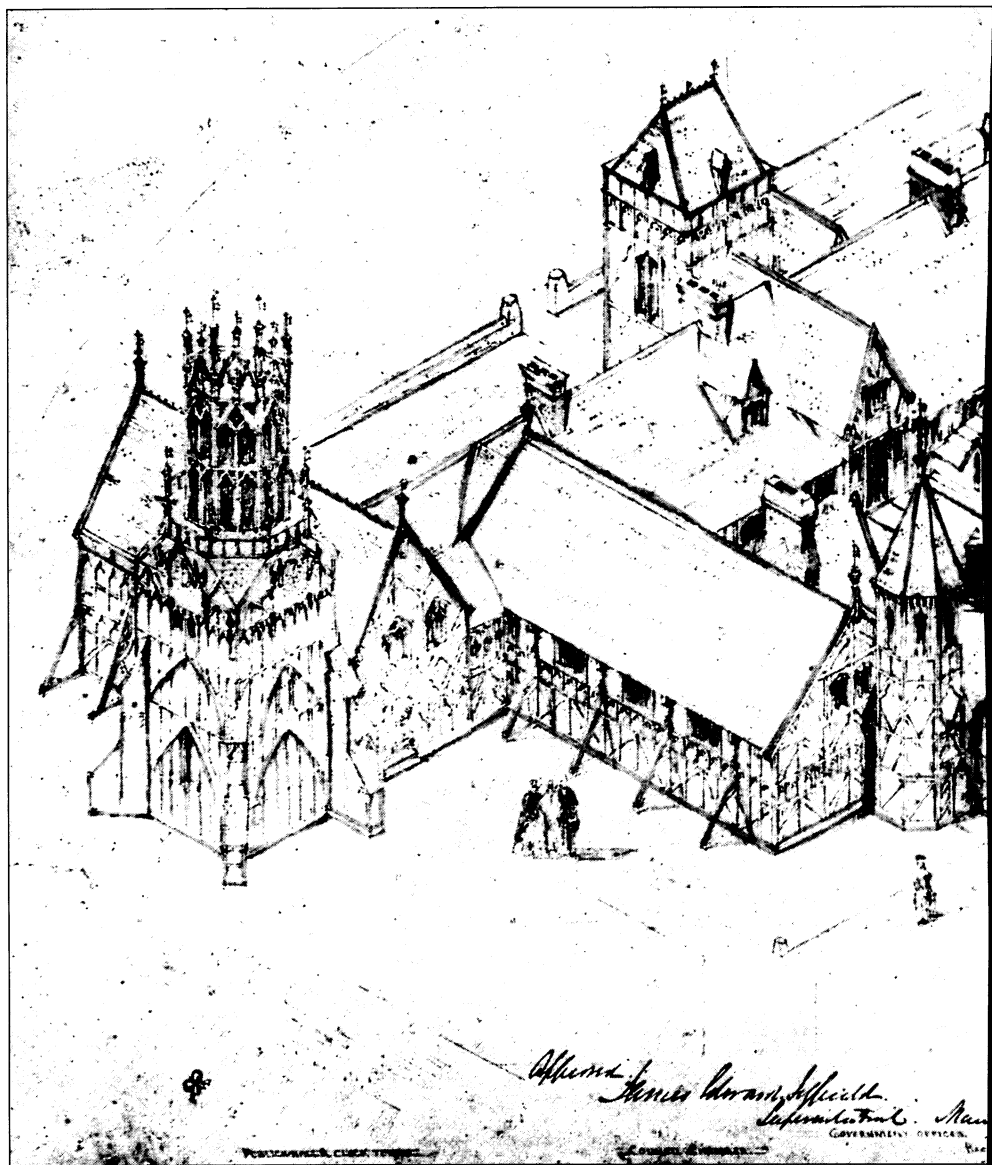
The Wooden Buildings

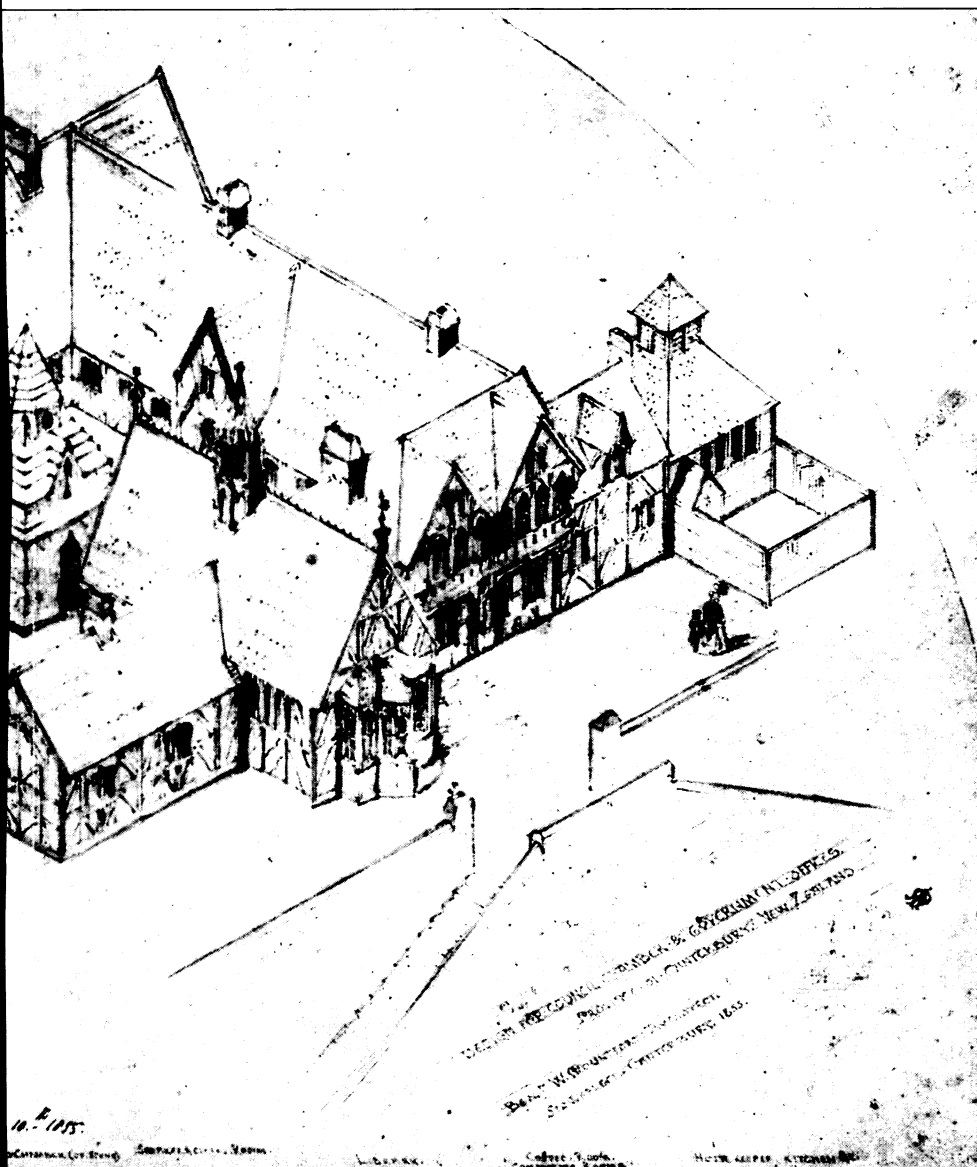
The Provincial Council took the first steps towards providing itself with its own permanent quarters in 1854. In October of that year, the Superintendent, FitzGerald, spoke of the need for a suitable chamber and the Council voted money for a building not to cost more than £13,500. The architect Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort prepared plans for a two-storey timber complex, forming an enclosed courtyard with a records office in the centre, a clock tower and council chamber to the south and offices, councillors' rooms and a library on the other three sides. A drawing of this proposed building has survived, and although the plans were later modified considerably, portions of today's buildings can be discerned in these original plans.

The style chosen for the design reflects the Victorian enthusiasm for the architecture of the Middle Ages. Barry and Pugin's design of the new Houses of Parliament in Westminster had established the Gothic Revival style as England's national architecture. It was

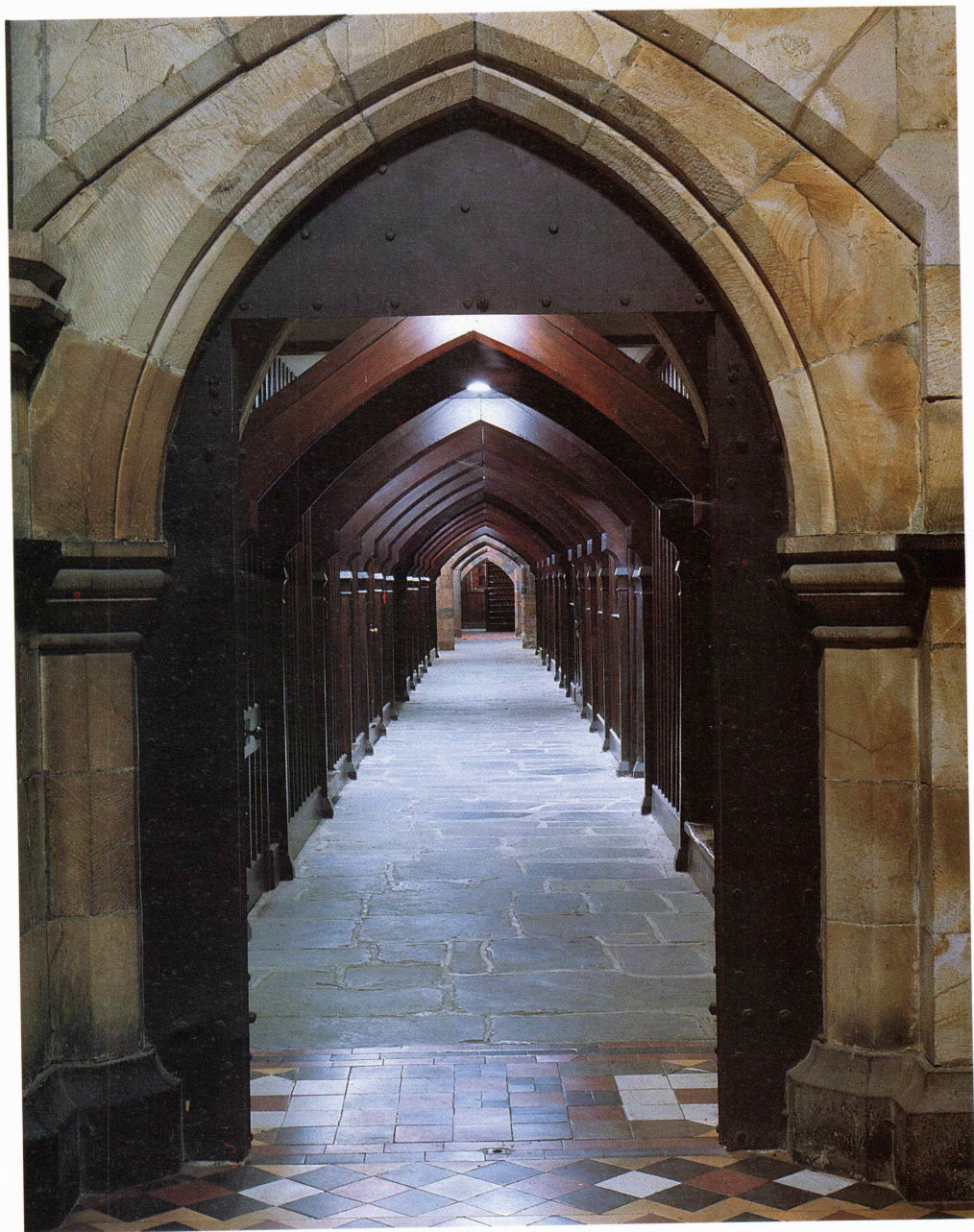


The Durham Street frontage of the oldest part of the Buildings.





B.W. Mountfort's original design (1855) for the Provincial Council Buildings, a two-storey timber complex with an enclosed courtyard.





The main frontage of the second stage of the Buildings, including the stone tower, faces Armagh Street.

obvious for Mountfort to follow the example of the “home country” and to adopt the same style for the new Provincial Council Buildings.

Nothing was actually done until August 1857 when tenders were called for a building of considerably altered design. The Council Chamber was still on the southern side of the site, but the public hall and north wing and much of the east wing had been deleted; there was a stone section for a records office on Durham Street. The buildings were open to the river on the east. A tender for the construction of this building was accepted in October 1857.

The site on which it was proposed to build these new government buildings was originally reserved for a public hospital. A bill was passed giving the hospital five acres of the public domain (where Christchurch Hospital still stands), leaving the triangular site bounded by the Avon River, Durham and Armagh Streets free for the Provincial Council Buildings.

The foundation stone was laid on 6 January 1858 by W.S. Moorhouse, then at the beginning of his spectacular, erratic career in Canterbury provincial politics. Although the buildings were neither planned nor completed while Moorhouse was Superintendent, it was appropriate he should have laid the stone as the

buildings as a whole express the confidence in Canterbury's future which he more than any other early Canterbury politician embodied.

The day was declared a public holiday and the ceremony made "a striking scene of gaiety". The shape of the new buildings was outlined by flags. A procession made a roundabout progress from St Michael's Church, via Oxford Terrace, Hereford Street, the Square, Victoria Street and Durham Street to the site where a band played *Rule Britannia* and a salute was fired by nine guns. Christchurch at the time had a population of about 1,000 and Canterbury scarcely 7,000.

These earliest wooden buildings were relatively plain. The windows were square headed and mullioned, except for the Council Chamber itself, the windows of which were foliated and pointed. The building was described at the time as a "plain building of the middle pointed style" with external bracing and a simple design "as much Tudor as Gothic". The building had an irregular outline, with gables and dormers and the entrance raised an additional storey to form a small tower.

The wooden Council Chamber was certainly the most impressive part of these early buildings: "A picturesque wooden apartment with a fine arched ceiling, panelled walls and a chastely ornamented public gallery". Its "lofty open-traceried roof" was admired. Native woods were used for the panelling. The *Lyttelton Times* remarked that a particularly attractive feature of the Chamber was the oriel window on the south side. Its fine tracery is still admired today. The dormer windows on the north side of the wooden Council Chamber are a later addition.

These new buildings were first used by the Council at the end of September 1859. But even before they were ready for occupation, in February 1859, tenders were called for extensions. A contract was let for the second part of the wooden buildings, a north wing and continuation of the western frontage, in May 1859. The province was already, by 1859, enjoying greater prosperity. In 1862, the *Lyttelton Times* said the extensions told "of a time when provincial prosperity demanded increased accommodation".

The 1859 additions were in a more ornate, "more clearly Gothic" style than the original buildings and demonstrate Mountfort's growing mastery in adapting European architectural styles to colonial conditions. All the windows were now foliated. Instead of



The Buildings in 1861, soon after completion of the first two stages.

using dormer windows, as in the earlier section, bay windows rising through two floors were employed. In the centre of the northern, Armagh Street, frontage was a tower of red stone, with alternating white bands. The exterior was sheathed in vertical board and batten and the roof was shingled.

This second section of the wooden buildings was completed by October 1861. The Council itself continued to meet in the wooden Council Chamber which had been part of the first section erected.

A notable interior feature of both of the two wooden sections of the Provincial Council Buildings is the long corridor which runs around the inside edge of the buildings. This internal thoroughfare has heavy structural timbers and is paved with irregularly shaped stone slabs, the surfaces of which were picked with holes to give sound footing. (These stone slabs replaced an original flooring of wooden blocks.) The longest view down this corridor was, the *Lyttelton Times* noted in 1862, a full two hundred feet. Its mediaeval, cloister-like atmosphere is still admired.

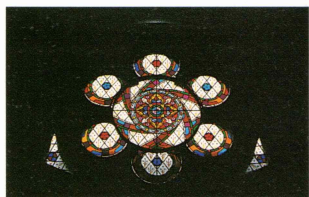
The completion of these two first, largely wooden stages of the Provincial Council Buildings confirmed Mountfort's standing as Canterbury's leading architect. But his triumph, the stone Council Chamber, was yet to come.

The Stone Chamber

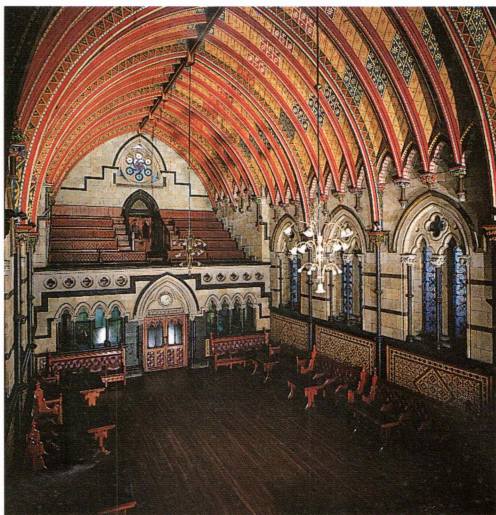
Handsome as the wooden chamber was, when the number of members of the Provincial Council was increased in 1861 to thirty-five it became overcrowded. The Province's finances were in a sound state by the early 1860s. Land sales were proceeding steadily; the demand for meat was stimulated by the Otago gold rush of 1861; and the wool trade was buoyant. Christchurch in 1857 had been "a little patch of scattered houses, a mere nothing in the vastness of the plain". In the 1860s it began to acquire a sprinkling of buildings in more durable stone. To the handful of stone buildings in the Lyttelton Harbour basin were added, in Christchurch, the Big School at Christ's College (1863), the Durham Street Methodist Church (1864) and St John's Church, Latimer Square (1865). But until 1864, the wooden Provincial Council Buildings were almost the only buildings of any architectural



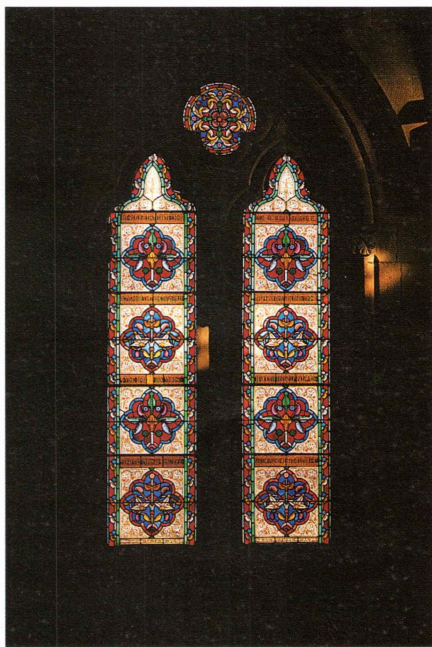
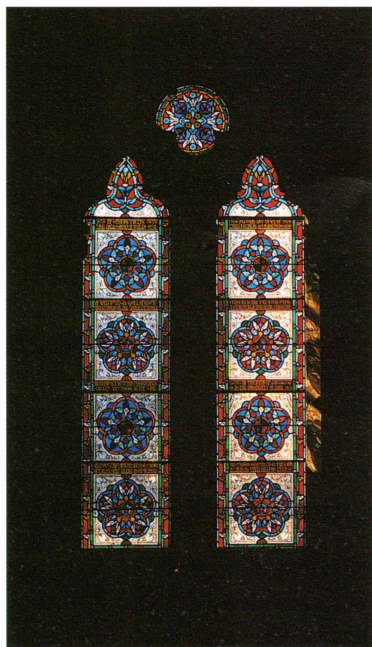
The exterior of the Stone Chamber from Durham Street.

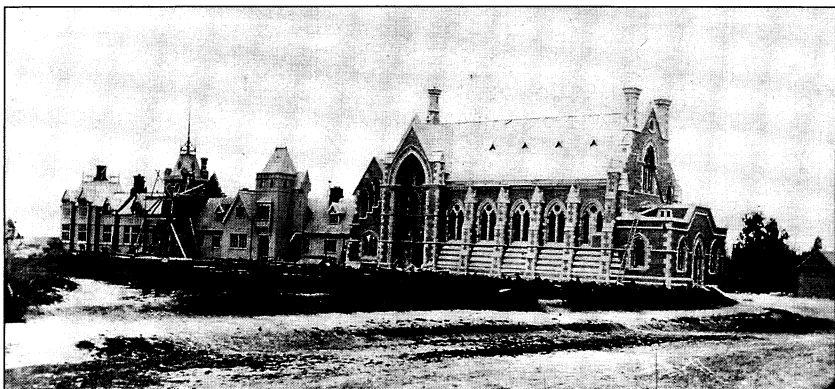


Examples of windows in the Stone Chamber.



Interior of the Stone Chamber.





The Buildings in 1865, with the Stone Chamber just completed.

pretension in Christchurch. They were soon to be eclipsed in architectural grandeur by a stone Council Chamber.

Mountfort was instructed to prepare plans for this proposed stone Chamber and also for a Bellamy's in stone in March 1864. By June he had drawings and a model ready for approval by the Executive Council. A contractor, Messrs Forgan and Son, was engaged to erect the buildings at a total cost of £22,000.

The first session of the Provincial Council to be held in the new Chamber opened on 21 November 1865. The Superintendent, Samuel Bealey, congratulated the Council on meeting in a building "in every way worthy of the purpose to which it has been devoted, and which will, I trust, be found not only to afford suitable accommodation for the transaction of business, but will also be an object of ornament to this city and a credit to Canterbury for the future".

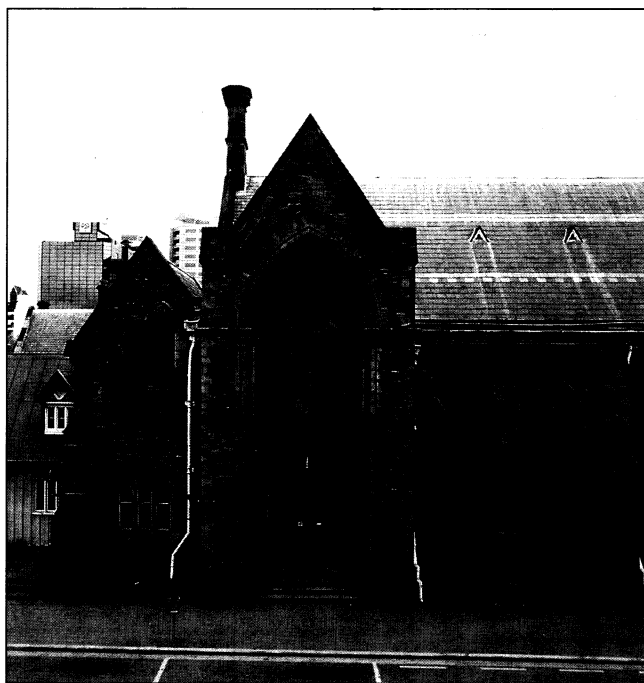
The Provincial Council was in fact meeting in more sumptuous and dignified surroundings than the Colonial Parliament which had then just moved to Wellington and taken up residence in Wellington's much humbler Provincial Council Buildings. The new Chamber satisfied Canterbury's hunger "for the ideal of Parliamentary government — as it hungered for English birds and English buildings — because it was familiar, because it relieved the homesickness of exile".

The stone Council Chamber was a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture adapted superbly for secular purposes. In 1868 Lord

Lyttelton, visiting Canterbury, said of the Chamber that though not large it was "very beautiful. It is Gothic, and, if anything, somewhat too chapel like and ecclesiastical looking, but of exquisite work throughout". In the 1920s a writer observed the Chamber was a fine example of how a Gothic structure could conform to the needs of a hall so little like a church.

A contemporary observer wrote that "the style of the building is pointed of the English development" but with, in parts, a motif of 'continentalism' "treated in an original and national manner". The Chamber was said to exemplify the manner in which the pointed style could adapt itself to different requirements when treated not as a mere dead mask but as a real living development for our everyday wants. The building was seen as a living work, not "an archaeological copy, interesting only to the antiquarian".

Today the stone Council Chamber is generally described as a fine example of High Victorian Gothic. Its exterior gives an impression



Entrance to the Stone Chamber, Durham Street.

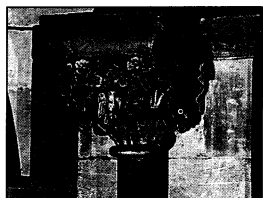
of solid, heavy strength. On concrete foundations "of great thickness and strength" rise massive buttresses which form six bays on each side of the building. The walls rise from five feet six inches (1.7 metres) thick at the base to two feet nine inches (.85 metre) thick at the top. On the Durham Street frontage, in the sixth, wider, bay is a grand arch, finished with a sharply pointed gable and bold coping, which provides a dignified entrance to the Chamber. Mountfort achieved a skillful transition from the lofty new building to the lower, older wooden one alongside it by an extra gable, the staircase within which is marked, on the exterior, by stepping of the windows and the courses of stone. At the south end is a great gable with two high chimney stacks "very boldly and effectively treated".

The exterior walls of the Chamber are of small, irregular blocks of Halswell basalt, held together by hydraulic lime. String courses and facings are of Hoon Hay basalt and a 'trachyte porphyry' from Ellis's Quarry. Some Governors Bay sandstone and Weka Pass limestone were used on the exterior in less exposed situations. The main Halswell stone was thought to have 'a cold tone' which was relieved by the brown and yellow tonings of the other stones used.

The interior of the Council Chamber is the building's greatest glory. It is seventy-three feet long, thirty-one feet wide and forty feet to the apex of the roof. There are galleries at each end. The main stones used were a 'straw-tinted' Charteris Bay sandstone, Weka Pass limestone (for the carvings) and the trachyte porphyry from Ellis's Hoon Hay Quarry, used for pillars and lintels and oiled to give it a dark sheen.

The interior of the Chamber has many notable features. The vestibule is separated from the Chamber itself by an arcaded screen which also serves to support the main, strangers', gallery above. In the vestibule, too, are the encaustic tiles on floor and walls which continue on to the walls of the Chamber. These were manufactured in Shropshire by Maw and Company. The double-faced clock is a horological rarity. It is believed only five of its type were manufactured.

Within the Chamber itself, the stained glass windows are predominantly azure and ruby in colour, on a delicate grisaille ground of intertwined oak and foliage. The effect is "brilliant and sparkling". The windows include morally improving texts which were no doubt intended to guide the councillors in their deliberations.



Details of capitals and corbels.

The thickness of the walls allowed Mountfort to define each window with a free-standing inner tracery. The windows were manufactured in Britain to Mountfort's designs by Lavers and Barraud and are one of the finest groups of secular Victorian stained glass in New Zealand.

The carvings in the Chamber were the work of William Brassington. The corbels include likenesses of Victorian worthies, among them Queen Victoria herself, but also, if a Brassington family tradition is to be believed, a Christchurch barmaid. Brassington himself and J.C. St Quentin, who stencilled the ceiling, are also represented by small carved figures. No two of the foliated capitals of the many small columns are alike, illustrating "the lifelike character of the style". Visitors can share Brassington's delight in his task by discovering for themselves among the intricate carvings human heads, birds, a cat, frogs and other likenesses.

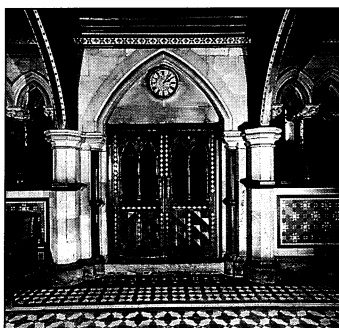
On the elegant arched ridge and furrow ceiling, "the chief and crowning feature of the building" it was commented in 1865, J.C. St Quentin stencilled Mountfort's colourful designs — a task which took four months, not the two years and two barrels of brandy of popular legend.

The timbers used in the interior were the native kauri and rimu. The inlaid doors, with bronze handles, were crafted by a local cabinet maker, Diethier, again to the architect's design.

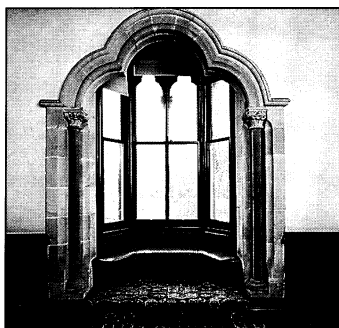
An ingenious heating system in which hot water was ducted through the floor of the council chamber was incorporated into the building's structure, but the architect also provided two fireplaces in the Chamber itself because "without a visible fire, people do not like to believe they are warm". Air circulation was ensured by a duct above the ridge of the ceiling, vented through a "chimney" on the north gable. From the outset the chamber was lit by gas, supplied by the Christchurch Gas Company which had been set up in 1862.



An early view of the river frontage of Bellamy's.



Door to Stone Chamber.



Oriel window of Speaker's room.

Bellamy's

The members of the mother Parliament at Westminster enjoyed social and dining facilities in what was known as Bellamy's. In their determination to imitate the Westminster model, Canterbury's provincial councillors made provision in their Provincial Council Buildings for a Bellamy's of their own.

The new stone Bellamy's, built closer to the river than the Chamber, is a plainer, more domestic building than the Chamber itself. It has walls of a fine-grained Halswell basalt, with facings and a base course of a pinkish-brown Port Hills trachyte and string courses of a speckled Hoon Hay basalt.

Within were a large upper room, described in 1865 as "the pleasantest room in Canterbury", which was used successively as smoking room, coffee room, museum and Superintendent's offices. Below this were a dining room, cellar and kitchen. Upstairs there were also living quarters for the housekeeper.

Later in its life, when the building was being used by the Lands Department, the first-floor balcony overlooking the river was closed in.

To make room for the stone Council Chamber and for Bellamy's, parts of the first wooden buildings erected in 1858-59 were either demolished or shifted. The eastern end of the wooden Council Chamber, including a small, forty-foot octagonal tower, was shifted north-east across the courtyard to the corner of the Buildings. But the wooden Council Chamber itself was retained on its original site. There were plans in 1864 to sheath this building in stone, but they were fortunately never carried out. Johannes Andersen, who worked in the old Provincial Council Buildings and wrote about them in his book *Old Christchurch*, commented: "The wooden council chamber was left, whether through sentiment or not I never heard, so that the new stone portions were separated, or connected, with a wooden portion; and I think sentiment should be the word, though it could have been admiration too, for it is a very beautiful room".

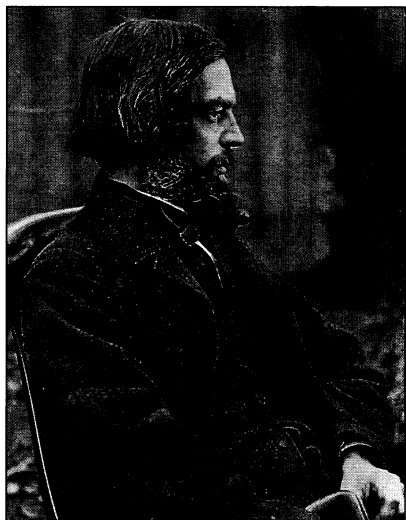
B.W. Mountfort

Architect of all stages of the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings was Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort. Born in England in 1825, Mountfort was articled in 1844 to a leading British architect, R.C. Carpenter. He arrived in Canterbury in 1850 on board the *Charlotte Jane* with his wife, Emily, whom he had married just before sailing. Their seven children were all born in New Zealand.

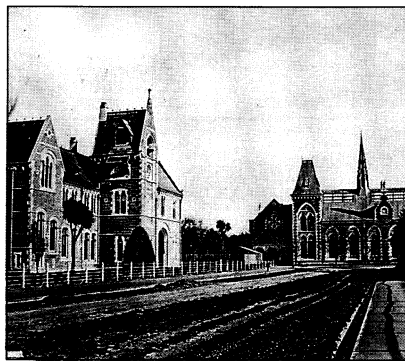
Mountfort's architectural career got off to a shaky start when timber which had not been properly seasoned was used to execute his design for the first Holy Trinity in Lyttelton in 1853. The building had eventually to be demolished. He continued to design churches and in 1857, in partnership with Isaac Luck, secured appointment as architect to the Province of Canterbury. It was in this capacity that he designed all three stages of the Provincial Council Buildings.

The partnership with Luck lasted until 1864. Maxwell Bury took Luck's place as partner from 1864 to 1866, but thereafter Mountfort practised on his own. An earnest churchman, Mountfort was devoted to the Gothic style. His other notable buildings in Christchurch include the Canterbury Museum, the Clocktower Block and Great Hall of Canterbury College (now part of the Arts Centre), Holy Trinity Church Avonside, Trinity Congregational Church (now the State Trinity Centre) and the Church of the Good Shepherd, Phillipstown. From 1873 on he supervised the construction of the Anglican Cathedral. He was also the architect of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Parnell, Auckland.

Mountfort was described as "a short man; of a most lovable and genial disposition, but essentially a student, a recluse; his one interest was architecture". In 1872 he was elected the first President of the the Canterbury Association of Architects, the first professional body of its kind in New Zealand. He died in 1898 at the age of seventy-four, leaving Christchurch an impressive legacy of Gothic buildings, foremost among them the Provincial Council Buildings.



B.W. Mountfort



*Two other Mountfort buildings.
Left: Canterbury College; right:
Canterbury Museum.*

The Buildings Survive

In 1876 when the provincial system was abolished, the assets and property of the Provincial Governments passed to the Central Government. In Canterbury, the Provincial Council Buildings were retained for use by various government departments. The major occupants were the Lands and Survey and Lands and Deeds Departments. The first (wooden) Council Chamber became the meeting room for the Land Board. Later the Departments of Agriculture and Justice also found accommodation in the Buildings.

The stone Council Chamber was used intermittently for special occasions, including luncheons and balls, and as a meeting place for such bodies as the Anglican Synod and the Arbitration Court. The Maori Land Court sat in the Chamber into quite recent times. When some of Canterbury's great estates were being broken up for closer settlement, ballots to allocate the small farms being created were held in the Chamber. The only major alteration to the structure of the Buildings was the enclosing of the balcony of

Bellamy's in 1906 to provide additional office accommodation. There were also minor additions in the courtyard in the early twentieth century.

Up to 1928, the Buildings were owned by the Central Government and administered by the Public Works Department. In the first three decades of this century there was some public agitation to have the Buildings given over to local control, to ensure that they would be preserved. This was one of the earliest historic preservation 'campaigns' mounted in New Zealand. In 1928 Parliament passed the Canterbury Provincial Buildings Vesting Act which provided for the timber Council Chamber and the stone buildings to be "preserved and maintained as a memorial to the foundation of the Province of Canterbury". A Board was set up to administer the Buildings, made up of the Minister of Lands and the Canterbury and Westland members of Parliament (Westland having been part of Canterbury until 1868). There was no intention in 1928 to preserve the rest of the wooden buildings, but they survived nonetheless and in 1971 the remaining wooden parts of the Buildings were also brought under the control of the Board.

Under the 'nebulous regime' set up in 1928, the Buildings deteriorated somewhat. They remained in use by government departments. The stone Chamber for a time was used as a theatre.

With the 1960s came growing awareness of the historical value of the Buildings and alternative, more appropriate civic uses were proposed for the Buildings. In 1968 \$100,000 were spent on consolidation of the Buildings prior to full restoration. In 1976 the Act under which the Buildings were administered was amended and a more suitable board constituted. A system of volunteer guides to conduct visitors around the Buildings was inaugurated and there was a steady improvement in the condition of the Buildings.

In 1988, the Act of Parliament governing the Buildings was amended and the Buildings were vested in the Canterbury United Council. That body's successor, the Canterbury Regional Council, is now responsible for the Buildings and their administration.

In 1989-90 a programme of seismic strengthening was carried out on the stone Council Chamber to secure it against possible damage from earthquakes. Steel cross ties were inserted into the roof of the Chamber, but otherwise the visual effects of the strengthening have been minimal.



The Clock Tower

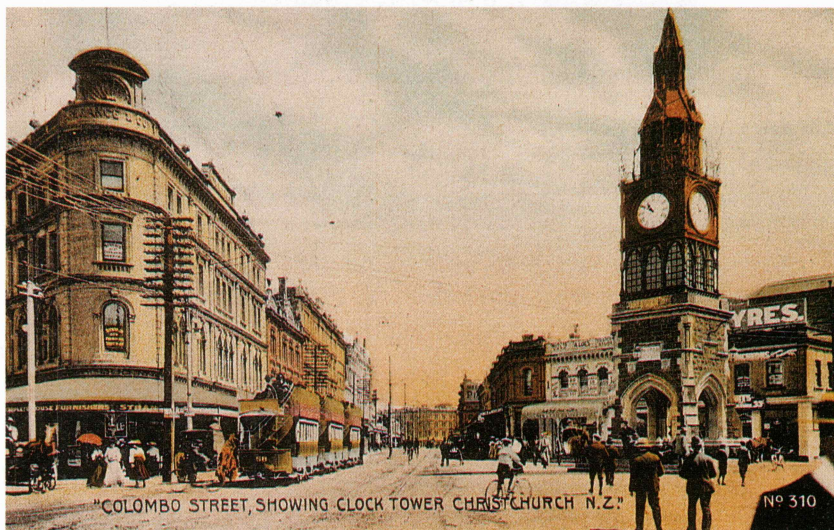
The clock tower which occupies a triangular site on the corner of Victoria, Montreal and Salisbury Streets, a few blocks north of the Provincial Council Buildings, has a close historical association with the Buildings.

In January 1861, the *Lyttelton Times* noted that "a massive clock tower" was about to be added to the Provincial Council Buildings which, the paper predicted, would "add greatly to the general good effect". This clock tower had been ordered at the time the wooden buildings were under construction. The ironwork was fabricated by Skidmore and Sons of Coventry in 1859 and the clock in Clerkenwell. Clock and tower arrived in Canterbury at the end of

1860. They were erected temporarily at the southern end of the buildings, but tower and clock together proved too heavy for the wooden tower at the south-west corner of the original wooden Council Chamber, so they were taken down again. In 1861 the clock was installed in the tower on the Armagh Street frontage and the ironwork was erected in the courtyard of the Provincial Buildings. Later it was stored in the City Council's yard which occupied the site on which Captain Scott's statue now stands. In 1876 it became the property of the Central Government, but was left in Christchurch.

It languished, dismantled in storage, until the late 1890s. In 1897 the clock was removed from the Armagh Street tower and sent to England to have chimes added. The clock and tower were erected as a memorial to the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria at the intersection of High, Lichfield and Manchester Streets, on a stone base designed by the Christchurch architects Strouts and Ballantyne.

In 1930, because of traffic congestion at that corner, the clock tower was taken down and re-erected on the corner of Montreal, Victoria and Salisbury Streets, where it still stands. It was renovated in 1978.



The clock tower at the corner of Manchester and High Streets (not on Colombo Street, as the old postcard wrongly states).

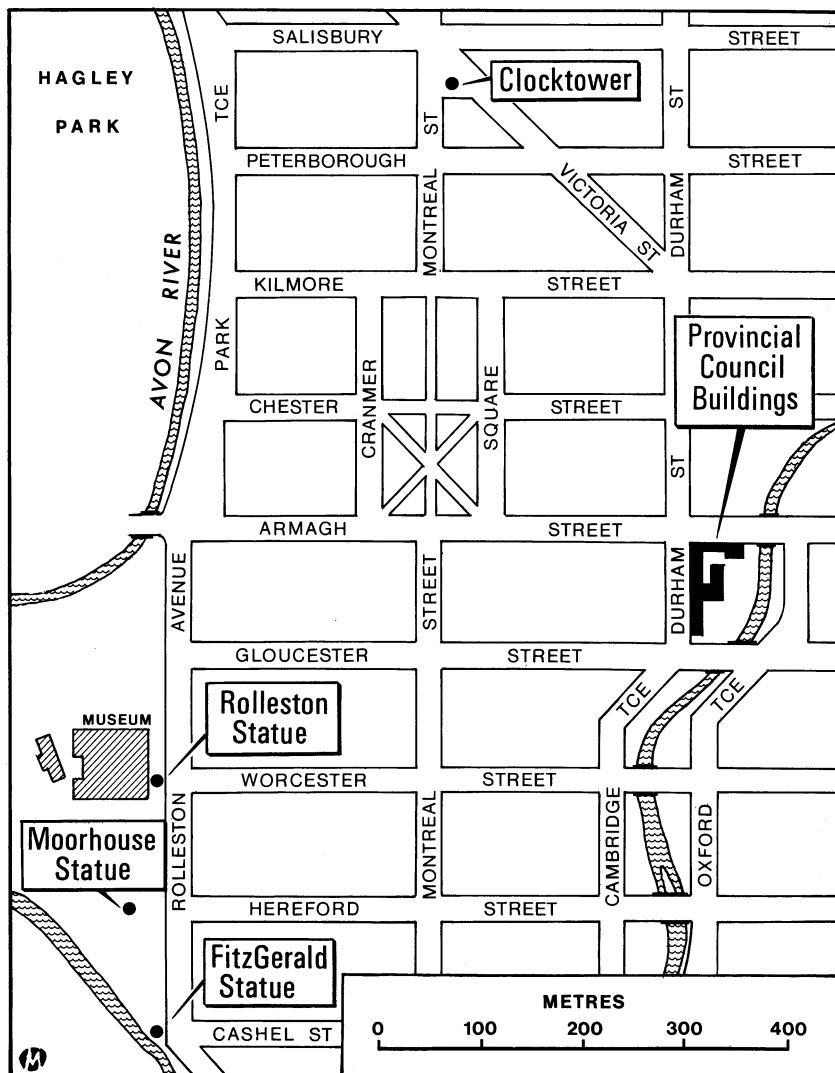
A Focus for Pride

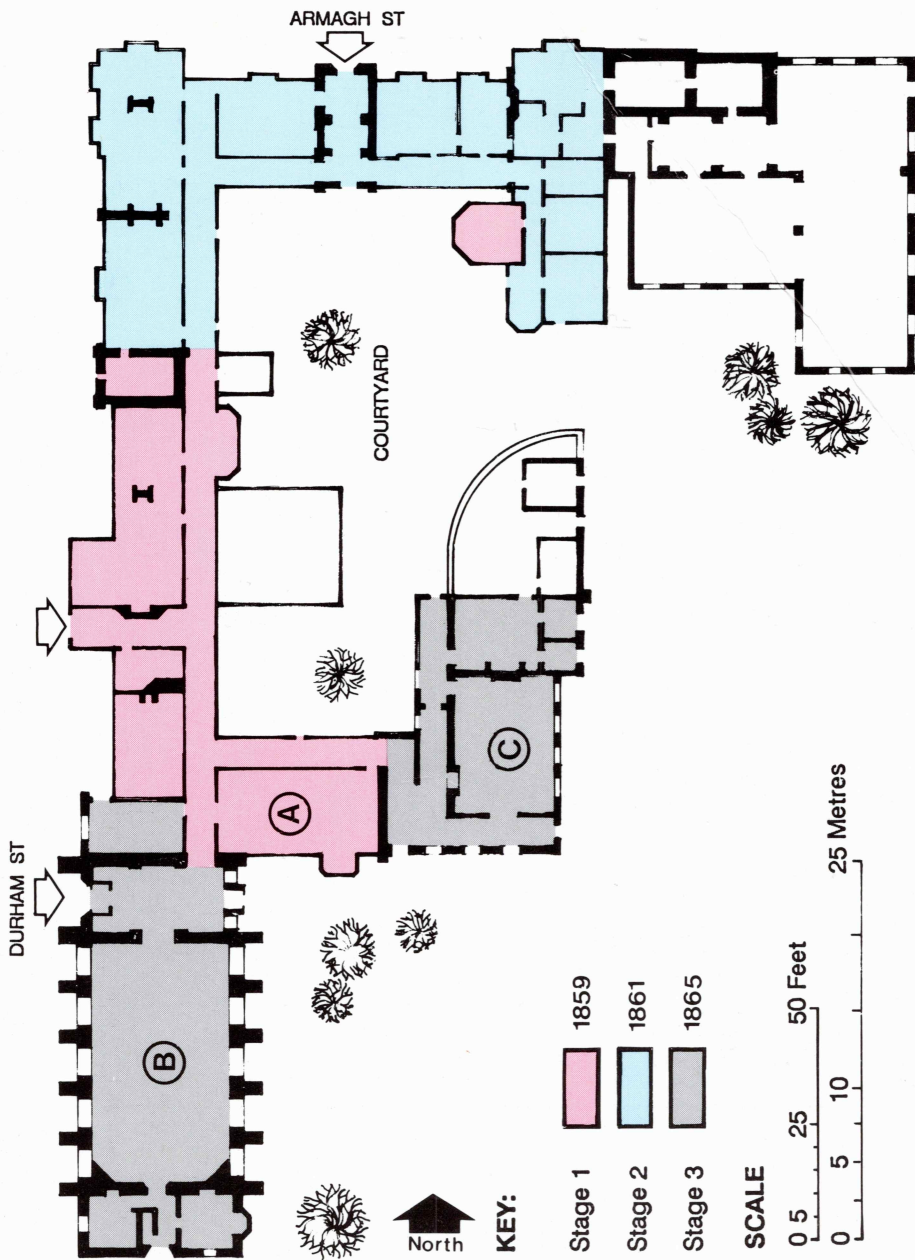
Christchurch is fortunate to have retained from the period of provincial government Buildings which have earned high acclaim through the years. Johannes Andersen described the Buildings as "one of the loveliest examples of Gothic architecture to be seen in the Dominion". Robert Heaton Rhodes declared the stone Chamber "our most beautiful edifice" and lamented that "many dwellers in our city cannot spare the time to examine its interior". One of Christchurch's most creative architects, Samuel Hurst Seager, declared them to be "the only historic buildings of architectural value in New Zealand". Among the overseas visitors who have echoed these words of praise have been Anthony Trollope, Mark Twain and, more recently, the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner.

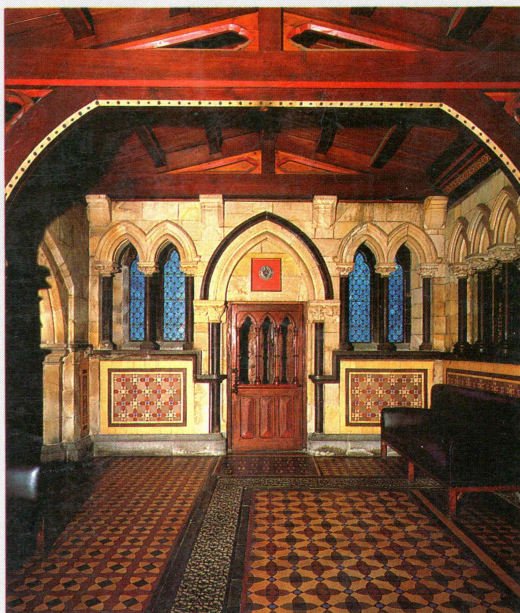
Greatly admired for their architecture, the Buildings are also of outstanding historical importance. With the controversial demolition of the Nelson Provincial Council Buildings in 1969, Canterbury's buildings are now the only remaining Provincial Council Buildings built for their purpose in New Zealand. It is appropriate that the capital of the province which chalked up remarkable achievements in the provincial period should now boast New Zealand's finest and only surviving Provincial Council Buildings.

"New Zealand is fortunate" we can agree "that its best complex of provincial buildings has survived, and so is Canterbury to have such an unrivalled focus for pride in its past."









The Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings are considered the finest example of secular Gothic Revival architecture in New Zealand and are Christchurch's most historic buildings.

This guidebook gives the historical background to these magnificent Buildings and describes their outstanding features.

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